

**Fall 2021**  
**San José State University**  
Department of English and Comparative Literature  
English 242, Nonfiction Writing Workshop

Professor Regina Arnold  
Email: Message through Canvas (regina.arnold@sjsu.edu)  
Office Hours: by Appointment  
Class Days/Time: W 7:00 - 9:45 PM  
Classroom: Synchronous remote instruction (Zoom)

**Overview**

This is a creative writing workshop that focuses on nonfiction. In this class, we will read, study and practice writing various types of creative nonfiction, including but not limited to memoir, essays, narrative reporting, and criticism.

Creative nonfiction is a term that loosely encompasses many forms of writing, all drawn from a core place of fact, rather than fiction. It is often described as “true stories, well told.” In this class, we will be exploring different ways of approaching factual material, stretching our writerly voices, and considering different styles of conveying information. As with fiction, the key question to any piece of narrative nonfiction text is, what is at stake? Whether it is a personal anecdote, an interview, speech, or analysis of a book or song, that question still stands. For example,

-- A review of the TV series “Ted Lasso” may not only describe the show but also suggest that it is about toxic masculinity and discuss ways of dismantling it.

-- The essay “Enjoli” by Kristi Coulter discusses how wine is marketed to women, but also explores how it encourages alcoholism and helps to mask female rage, boredom and oppression.

-- The article “I Was a Cable Guy” by Lauren Hough wittily examines a particular work experience while also interrogating the ways that Americans regard labor, gender, and blue-collar health practices to tell a larger story about capitalism.

Writers in all genres can benefit from learning how to raise the stakes in their own writing. In this class, we will practice how to make our prose more stylish, memorable, and compelling.

**Course Objectives**

- To teach students the process of planning, researching, reporting, and writing nonfiction
- To help students develop as critical readers, writers, and editors
- To help develop our writerly voices so that we are more compelling practitioners
- To consider ways of raising the stakes in our essays
- To understand some of the prerogatives in publishing and, ideally, how to query, submit, and gain acceptance at nonfiction writing outlets.

## **Pedagogical Approach**

This course operates as a seminar and workshop. Each class will include discussion of a text, a writing prompt, some writing time, and presentation. We will also have guest speakers. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in every session.

## **Zoom and Participation**

Please make sure your cameras are on during the session, unless you have a special reason (or I say you can turn them off.) Remember to join class in MUTE mode.

## **Grades**

You work and participation in this workshop will be graded based on both participation and quality, according to the following standards: A = excellent B = good C = satisfactory D = unsatisfactory F = Failure.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

Quality of workshop participation: (In-class discussion, peer review, preparedness)	300
Project #1:	150
Project #2:	150
Final Project:	400

A = 900 - 1,000 points B = 800 - 899 points

C = 700 - 799 points D = 600 - 699 points F = less than 600 points

## **Projects**

In the course of this semester, you should submit about 10,000-12,000 words of polished, revised prose this semester. We will be working on three projects in different genres, two of which must include some sort of research, and only one may be written solely from personal experience. All of the projects may be written in first, second, or third person, or a combination of points of view. You must do projects in at least two different genres (i.e. profile, biography, opinion, essay, narrative, etc.) and submit at least one of your projects to a reputable outlet.

All projects must be typed, use a normal font (12pt. Times New Roman), and submitted in the proper format (i.e. a query letter, a manuscript). All assignments are due on their announced due dates. Late projects will be penalized one full letter grade for each day the project is late.

## **Additional Information Available Online**

You are responsible for reading the following information online at <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/comp/policy/index.html>

- Course guidelines

- Academic policies (academic integrity, plagiarism, ADA and AEC policies)
- Estimation of Per-Unit Student Workload
- Recording policies
- Adding and dropping classes

This syllabus is also available online at:

<https://www.sjsu.edu/english/currentstudents/syllabi/index.html>

English MA and MFA Program Learning Outcomes are available at:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/ma/learningoutcomes/index.html>

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/mfa/mfalearningoutcomes/index.htm>